

Dining with *Anna Karenina*: Opening the Invitation to Burke's Parlor

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Kenneth Burke uses the metaphor of a parlor conversation to explain the dynamics of an academic discourse community. This metaphor demonstrates how one, after learning the conventions and the tenor of the parlor, can enter into a scholarly conversation. However, Burke's parlor metaphor fails to recognize that the conventions of the parlor may prevent certain people from speaking or being heard. Within the discourse community of composition studies, undergraduates are often excluded from academic conversations despite their relative familiarity with discourse conventions. This essay examines a dinner party scene from Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* as an example of Burke's parlor and proposes a shift in convention to make the discourse community more welcoming to undergraduates.

Like most papers written during my undergraduate years, this one began as a class assignment that followed the usual paradigm: planned, written, revised, turned in, graded, and placed into a recycling bin. While writing it, I was told to keep my audience in mind, and indeed, my audience was almost entirely imaginary. My professor, the only person to read my paper, took my assignment seriously and provided meticulous feedback, but nevertheless, my term paper was a form of currency to be converted into a grade. Once that was accomplished, the paper lost its value. As a requirement of the assignment, I had to investigate the ongoing academic conversation on the topic I selected and determine where my voice fit in it. Before I learned of the opportunity to publish in *Young Scholars in Writing*, I was cynical of this essay. The only conversation that my paper joined was the one held among other term papers duly discarded in the recycling bin at the conclusion of the semester—the ostensible end of the writing process for undergraduates. Although undergraduates are still in the process of learning conventions, they have much experience to gain from having the opportunity to participate in actual academic discourse. Mentors who work one-on-one with students can prepare them to participate in the conversation and, at length, welcome them to join.

In this paper, I will first discuss Kenneth Burke's parlor metaphor as a model for conversation in an academic discourse community. The parlor metaphor would seem to show how newcomers can enter into an academic conversation, but some have contended that the metaphor is too simplistic and ignores dimensions of the parlor that prevent newcomers from joining. After presenting a case for the use of literature as a frame for discussing issues in composition studies, I will adapt a dinner party scene from Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* into a metaphorical depiction of Burke's parlor to illustrate how undergraduate outsiders like me lack an invitation to truly participate in academic conversations with more senior scholars. *Anna Karenina*'s transgressions of the social conventions of nineteenth-century Russia will lead me to consider how refiguring the academic conventions that marginalize undergraduates may result in a more accepting and inclusive discourse community. Finally, I will argue for the inclusion of undergraduates in professional academic conversations by opening more opportunities and pairing them with experienced mentors who can guide these newcomers into the discourse community.

Critiques of Burke's Parlor Metaphor

In his seminal *Philosophy of Literary Form*, Kenneth Burke encapsulates the conditions necessary to enter a conversation in his oft-quoted "parlor" metaphor. The parlor metaphor opens with a newcomer arriving late to an ongoing social situation:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. . . . (110)

At length, the newcomer, though initially unsure of the spirit of the discussion, forays his or her own voice into the conversation and captivates the other guests:

You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you. . . . (110)

As others have done, I will situate the parlor metaphor within the context of an academic discourse community. With this positioning, the newcomer to the parlor reflects a beginning composition student who must first be acquainted with the discussion and the conventions within the discipline before being able to contribute to the academic conversation. The parlor metaphor in this context assumes that the only prerequisite for entrance into the discourse community is the ability to understand the nature of the conversation. Once students have "caught the tenor the argument," then they are supposed to be able to simply insert their voices into the conversation and be readily accepted by the others in the parlor.

However, the reality of academic discourse communities undermines the fantasy of this model. Many academic writers who already have knowledge of both the discourse and its conventions find themselves excluded from the parlor. An invitation to Burke's parlor is not an invitation to speak, or to be heard, or even to be esteemed. Conventions of an academic discourse community create a power structure, which inhibits—and at times, *prohibits*—newcomers, especially undergraduates, from entering the conversation. As it now stands, Burke's parlor amplifies some voices and suppresses others, and those inside the parlor must decide whether to revise Burke's metaphor to reflect this inequality or change the conventions of the community to make the parlor more inclusive and welcoming for undergraduates.

It would seem that the parlor already represents a multitude of disciplines and voices, and as Keith S. Peterson notes in his article, "An Archeology of Voices in the Parlor," "multiple discourses . . . define our discipline" (374). But he adds that this plurality is not democratic. Within these discourses exists a dominant discourse that determines the tenor of the parlor. Peterson attributes this voice to the "Insiders"—tenured and tenure-track professors and those who publish in well-respected journals. He uses the term "Outsiders" to classify graduate students, adjunct faculty, and undergraduate student writers. They lack the legitimacy to be granted much attention within the community. At times, some Outsiders have the opportunity to participate in the parlor, but participation in a discourse community does not entail belonging to it.

As an undergraduate writer, I am a wallflower within the parlor, the most distant from the discourse happening around me. Since my first-year composition seminar, I have been disciplined into my Outsider status. My composition classes took me through three phases of essay writing. The first essay was a personal narrative, asking me to recall a time when I made an important decision. In this paper, I was both the subject and the authority, but during the second essay, I lost some of my authority. The second essay asked me to write a similar narrative about a topic of which I had firsthand knowledge, but it required me to supplement my experience with data drawn from an online database source. I wrote my essay about rock-climbing, found an article tangentially related to my topic, and nabbed a convenient quote to fulfill the essay's requirements. In the third essay,

I surrendered my authority completely to database articles. My assignment sheet read “No first-person pronouns,” emphasized with bold-faced text.

My voice was an echo of Insider voices. Although I could employ logos and pathos in my essays, I learned that as an Outsider, I lacked ethos. Instead, I had to cite the works of Insiders and completely rely on their ethos to give me any credibility of my own. Even as I progress as a writer—as I learn the conventions of professional writing, develop original arguments, and publish essays in undergraduate journals—I remain on the outside of the academic discourse community. I have an honorary membership that permits me to listen to conversations happening inside the parlor, but I cannot participate in the discourse. Naturally, at a certain point in my academic career, I may traverse the boundary between the Outsiders and the Insiders, yet the passage into the Insider discourse community requires more than knowledge and rhetorical skills, regardless of what freshman composition textbooks like *They Say, I Say* may claim.

After all, rhetorical strategies aid only those who already are participating in the conversation. In his review of Joseph Harris’s guidebook, *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*, Jacob S. Blumner concedes that Burke’s parlor fails to indicate how novices might be led into the conversation. Without mentoring, student writers can only stand at the threshold of the parlor. Blumner claims that his book “helps writers see how academics are constantly rewriting the ideas of others to forward, counter, and build their own arguments through the acknowledgement of what has come before,” yet I contend that a textbook demonstration of the Burkean parlor lacks the necessary realism to prepare a novice writer to enter into a conversation (71). In-class practice and study will allow an Outsider to listen to the conversation and to begin to understand the conventions that govern it, but without firsthand experience inside the parlor or an experienced mentor to act as a guide, the Outsider remains on the fringe of the parlor.

This is not to undervalue the importance of instructing the novice writer in various rhetorical strategies. Outsiders need to reach a level of knowledge and academic maturity before they are ready to participate in the professional conversations of a discipline. First-year writing students, for instance, are often only beginning to familiarize themselves with the genre of the essay, and they require more time to develop and hone their skills. However, Outsiders may be well past this point of maturity before their voices are seriously considered in the parlor. Even advanced writers may find themselves ignored in the parlor.

Indeed, Michelle Ballif, D. Diane Davis, and Roxanne Mountford challenge the “warmth and solidarity” that the parlor metaphor connotes (583). Their conversation specifically regards a feminist discourse community, but I will borrow their ideas and apply them to a broader academic community. These writers note that discourse communities often reject voices that do not homogenize with the communal “we” of a discipline (585). I equate this “we” with the Insiders, who control a discourse community and decide whether to acknowledge Outsiders. The practice of marginalizing Outsider voices creates a semi-comfortable space in the parlor where those of equal status can converse, but this space excludes Outsiders. Even when Outsiders try to enter into a conversation, they might be stifled or dismissed by Insiders as a manner of convention. Although they may not suppress Outsider voices directly, by paying Outsiders no heed, Insiders effectively render them unable to participate in the conversation.

As a remedy, Ballif, Davis, and Mountford propose renovating the parlor so that participation does not require an invitation, but *all* are welcomed and encouraged to both speak and listen. Ignoring Outsider voices is a passive way of silencing them. Senior scholars sometimes fail to listen to undergraduates and thereby deny them a space where they can mature and contribute to the discussions held in the discipline. Exclusion is a social norm of the discourse community: “We learn to exclude because we have been excluded; this process ‘haunts’ us in our efforts to emanci-

pate others and ourselves” (Ballif, Davis, and Mountford 591). Unless the norms of the parlor are challenged, this cycle will perpetuate.

Progress through Transgression

In this section, I will justify my case for using a scene from literature to illustrate the various ways Outsiders are dismissed, ignored, or silenced by Insiders. The application of literature in the composition classroom has diminished despite its potential to act as a useful metaphor for composition issues. Within English departments, a divorce has occurred between composition and literature. The academic discussion on the advantages of combining literature and composition faded in the 1980s (Briggs 5), and today, many composition courses shy away from the use of literature in the classroom in favor of focusing solely on student writing (Briggs 14). Yet often, the relationship between composition and literature is generative. Briggs argues that literature contributes to the teaching of composition “as a stimulus for ideas” for the student as well as a “model and point of departure for the organization and presentation of those ideas” (17). I believe literature provides a similarly useful frame for discussions of composition outside the classroom. Literature can ground the discussion of theory by providing a concrete example of a rhetorical situation for academic scrutiny and inquiry.

As such, to aid in my discussion of the power dynamic between Insiders and Outsiders within the discourse community of academia, I will draw on a literary version of Burke’s parlor from Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. Throughout the novel, Anna confronts the norms and mores present in the social theater of Russia. More specifically, in the scene that I have selected for analysis, Anna challenges the conventions that determine who is allowed around her dinner table by inviting commoners to dine among her upper-class coterie. Normally, class structure would preclude commoners a place at her table, but Anna, already at fault for violating Russia’s mores, continues her campaign of overturning social convention. I will reinterpret this power structure between classes at Anna’s dinner table to illustrate the conflict between Insiders and Outsiders in the parlor.

Before the dinner party scene, Anna intentionally and unapologetically violates the social and moral conventions of Russia when she engages in an adulterous affair with Count Alexei Vronsky. Even after her husband exposes her misconduct and society, too, learns of her affair, Anna refuses to end her relationship with Vronsky. However, her violation of convention ousts her from the domain of high society, and she flees to the countryside, where she may not be especially welcomed but is at least not unwelcomed. She creates a safe space at her country estate and searches for others who will accept her despite her transgression. Anna puts on a small formal dinner to celebrate the arrival of Darya, her slightly less privileged sister-in-law.

Spurned now by most members of high-class society, Anna is largely without friends or guests to attend her dinner, and in some of the chairs that would otherwise be occupied by the upper class, Anna seats an architect, a doctor, and a steward—all Outsiders to the Burkean parlor that she creates. Also among the dinner guests are nobles who forgive Anna’s actions but who do not possess Anna’s same warmth toward the Outsiders. Anna gathers a community of people who support her despite her transgression of convention, but the Insiders and Outsiders never mix with each other. The group of Insiders navigate easily through the dinner conversation, always certain that their voices are heard, but they pay no heed to the Outsiders except to emphasize the power structure that divides them, which I will discuss in the following sections.

Anna demonstrates that a break in convention is not necessarily an act of rebellion but can be, instead, an act of revision. Although Anna is unsuccessful, there is value in her attempting to revise the convention of dinner party etiquette. For my purposes, I will represent the Outsider characters at Anna’s dinner as metaphors for types of academic writers who exist in the discourse community of academia. An investigation into their interactions within this scene will allow me a means of

portraying and reflecting on the problem of Burke's parlor from an Outsider perspective. Entrance into a professional conversation is not as simple as understanding the conventions and the gist of the ongoing discourse when power structures present in the parlor dismiss new voices from joining.

Almost an Insider at the Dinner Party

Though mostly impermeable, the distinction between the Outsiders and the Insiders sometimes wavers. Darya feels "ill at ease" throughout her time at the estate, though she, too, is of the nobility as the wife of Anna's philandering brother (Tolstoy 617). As Darya tours the house, she remarks on the luxury in every room, but unlike a foreigner to such extravagance, she perceives the furniture familiarly as of "English make, sturdy, of good quality, and obviously very expensive" (618). Her experience and perception set her apart from the Outsiders, who are oblivious to their surroundings. Darya has been to many "big formal dinners and balls," but has now "become unused to [them]" (634). During this scene, she is at the same time both Outsider and Insider, both awkward and comfortable.

In terms of the allegory that I am creating, Darya is a graduate student or perhaps an adjunct faculty member, who is familiar with convention yet unwelcomed by those at the center. As she converses with Vronsky, she finds herself enchanted and curious about the estate, sharing the same feeling that a young scholar experiences when first becoming interested in an academic conversation: "Dolly [Darya] was simply surprised at what she had never seen before, and, wishing to understand it all, asked about everything in great detail. . ." (624). Vronsky, acting as a mentor, humors her questions and spellbinds her with new information. Darya remarks on her initial nervousness when speaking alone with Vronsky for the first time, and I am reminded of the first time I took advantage of a professor's office hours to inquire further about a topic glossed over in class (625). At length, my neurons overcame my nerves as fascination replaced fear. Our conversation fed my curiosity without satiating it. I recall leaving my professor's office armed with new knowledge and an armful of books and articles, for the first time feeling more like a scholar than a student.

Although Darya's excitement is comparable to that of a young scholar, she is not an ingénue in the parlor. The omniscient narrator allows her perceptions and evaluations to provide much of the insight in this scene. Between the spheres of the Insiders and the Outsiders, she notices the other characters' subtle actions as well as their silences. This awareness grants her the ability to recognize that the ostensible naturalness of the dinner conceals the hard work and attention that such an event demands:

Many of the other people she knew, never gave it a thought, and took for granted what any decent host wishes his guests to feel—namely, that everything he had arranged so well had cost him, the host, no trouble had got done by itself. But Darya Alexandrovna knew that not even the porridge for the children's breakfast got done by itself and that therefore such a complicated and excellent arrangement had required someone's close attention. (629)

A young writer might look at a professional journal article and think that its refined writing is merely an effortless product of experience, and while experience undoubtedly helps, a more advanced writer understands that such an essay must go through painful stages of rigorous revision to have a professional degree of polish. Darya, possessing such knowledge, can see through the facade that dazzles the other Outsiders.

Throughout the evening, Darya notices the rhetorical moves Anna uses to command the conversation, remarking that Anna performs with "her usual tact, naturalness and even pleasure." For instance, Anna diverts the topic to the neutral subject of the harvesting machine when a guest starts a conversation about the "governmental abuses in the United States." As the discussion shifts to

exclude the Outsiders, Anna manipulates the topic to reopen the conversation to them by asking the architect about the construction of the hospital (630). Like the dinner preparations that largely went unnoticed, Anna's rhetorical maneuvers are similarly subtle. Darya, who is critically observant, perceives the subtleties of Anna's actions, noting not only *what* Anna says but *how* she assumes control of the dinner conversation.

In spite of her skill at noticing the tenor of the conversation, which demonstrates her status as a semi-Insider, not even Darya blends in perfectly with the other participants in the parlor. Mere skill cannot help her if she does not speak. She adopts a passive role at the table, and when she finally joins the conversation, she is struck down by Vronsky: "On one occasion Darya Alexandrovna was cut to the quick and got so excited that she even turned red and later tried to recall whether she had said anything out of place or unpleasant" (632). Ballif, Davis, and Mountford comment on a similar occurrence within the feminist discourse community when people are "interrupting and ejecting each other from the parlor" (583). Of course, it is fair play to be critical of the works of other academics in the parlor. Darya speaks, but Vronsky intimidates her and dismisses her contribution to the conversation. In effect, even though Darya has the ability to speak in the parlor, she is intimidated into silence.

The Foolish Beginners at the Dinner Party

At the same time, the criticism that Darya suffers implicitly acknowledges that the Insiders take her seriously enough to offer a response. The architect, however, hardly speaks during the meal and goes virtually unnoticed despite the attention that he draws to himself. Like Darya, he knows the conventions of the dinner table, but the architect vacillates between knowing conventions and knowing how they function in practice. The architect arrives at dinner wearing a tailcoat while the other men wear black frock coats (629). Although he understands conceptually that the dinner party requires him to wear formal attire, he mistakenly wears clothes that are too flashy for the occasion. The attention that this garners from the other guests is critical. He unintentionally parodies the upper class with his garish outfit, which he wrongly believed would allow him to pass as an Insider. Instead, he advertises his Outsider status.

At the table, he remains "quiet and deferential," aware that he does not belong (630). Whatever he says will likely be ignored, as he has lost his ethos by failing to conform to the symbolic dimensions of the formal dinner. In this way, the architect parallels the first-year writer. Though eager to impress, new college writers try to mimic academic posturing but only betray their lack of understanding. I wince when I recall the first essays I submitted in my freshman composition courses. While I could ornament my writing with the college-level vocabulary that I pained myself to memorize during my high school English classes, I hadn't yet learned that professional writing requires matter as well as art. Like the architect, I studied but lacked any real experience in academic discourse, and as a result, I had to learn how to speak. I began to meet with my professors outside of class to ask questions and receive their feedback to guide me through the revision process. Both my professors and I learned to take my work seriously, and I overcame the foibles characteristic of first-year writing and advanced as a writer.

Learning through Observation at the Dinner Party

In the past, perhaps the doctor had an experience similar to the architect's. The doctor is similar to an upper-division composition student who knows that he has no place among the Insiders around him but has the ability to blend into the scene. Throughout the evening, the doctor remains silent, replying only laconically when spoken to. Still, he fits in with the other guests more so than the architect does. Making no impression is better than making a bad impression. In silence, the doctor is safe from embarrassment, and he can use the occasion to reevaluate his preconceptions

about the parlor. The architect, at his next dinner party, will have to do likewise. When he realizes that his presumptions do not hold up in practice, another dinner party will allow him another opportunity to study, not from a handbook of conventions but from a real-life example.

When I was a first-year writer, I believed diction alone determined my grade, and I quickly learned—after receiving a dissatisfactory grade—that I had to reconsider the components of an academic essay. I had to train myself to read the essays assigned in class as models for the essays I was supposed to write. This exercise concentrates on form rather than content, and it is essential to understanding the tenor of a conversation. The doctor is past making novice mistakes, but he has more to learn before he can overcome them. The architect, after his first failure, may follow the doctor and begin to observe and learn from what he witnesses at the dinner table. Even a passive position inside of the parlor will grant him the opportunity to gain professional development and may lead to future success as an interlocutor.

Humiliated at the Dinner Party

Regrettably, this process of learning takes time and several botched attempts before writers experience any true success within a discourse community. The steward is the undergraduate student who presents his first essay at a conference. Normally, a boundary between Insiders and Outsiders would prevent the steward from interacting with Insiders, but Anna invites him to participate in the conversation. Here, the steward has a chance to demonstrate that he belongs among Insiders, but he fumbles. When he speaks about the financial state of Vronsky's business, he becomes carried away and forgets his social context: "The German [steward] was about to go to his pocket, where he had a pencil in a little notebook in which he calculated everything, but, remembering that he was sitting at dinner and noticing Vronsky's cold gaze, he checked himself" (631). Rather than receiving gentle admonishment from a mentor, the steward corrects his behavior only after attracting Vronsky's "cold gaze." He possesses the self-awareness to stop himself before he further mangles convention, but the Insiders notice his faux pas.

Now exposed as an Outsider, the steward allows Vasenka Veslovsky, an aristocrat, to reinstate the power structure at the table. In response to the steward's blunder, Veslovsky speaks in German to tease the man: "A man who wants roubles will also have troubles" (631n5). Veslovsky uses a pun, which would make his comment seem playful, but he makes a class distinction between the steward and the rest of the table guests. This sort of doublespeak recalls the specialized language used by a discourse community. To Outsiders, words have one meaning, but within the community, the same phrase takes on a second meaning. On one level, Veslovsky replies relevantly to the steward's discussion, but on another level, he employs language to thicken the barrier between the Outsiders and the Insiders.

Having betrayed his position, the steward falls silent for the rest of the dinner. Though he had the opportunity to speak and the audience to listen to him, he was reminded that he did not belong in the parlor. Like Darya, he has been "cut to the quick," but he may permanently leave the discourse community (632). Experience often comes with embarrassment, but the steward lacks the confidence and self-assurance to try speaking again after already humiliating himself in front of an audience. With persistence, he might be able to surpass his shortcomings, but never having felt welcomed inside the parlor, he is likely to abandon it completely.

When I was a sophomore, I read an essay at a symposium. While I was prepared to read my paper, I did not anticipate the questions that I would be asked during the question-and-answer panel following my reading. Under pressure, I struggled to think of answers to give my audience, and I found myself tongue-tied. After submitting so many papers to my professors only to receive a grade and a perfunctory response, I did not expect my paper to be the source of an actual conversation, and I was glad but unready to have my voice taken seriously. Though at times flustered, I managed

to withstand the scrutiny of my audience, and the humiliation that I felt benefited me. At the next symposium or conference I attend, I will be ready to engage my audience's questions. However, other undergraduates at the symposium froze when asked a question and bungled their question-and-answer panels. Some of them, like me, will learn from their bad experiences, but others will be unable to overcome the mortification they suffered in front of the audience. They may decide that they do not belong in Burke's parlor and will refuse to submit to another symposium. As Outsiders, they faltered when suddenly thrust into an Insider environment and needed the support of a knowledgeable mentor to guide them through the conventions of the symposium.

“Due Courtesy” at the Dinner Party

Although Anna attempts to create a neutral environment for both Insiders and Outsiders to convene, she cannot devote herself wholly to the well-being of a single guest. She must prioritize the needs of the group over the individual, but she does try to have everyone speak at least once. I would say that Anna resembles a college professor. She is an Insider and mingles primarily with other Insiders, but she must also instruct a classroom filled with Outsiders as a part of her professional duties. She treats the Insiders with deference, because they are a part of the same coterie. Meanwhile, the conversations she starts with the Outsiders are merely “due courtesy” (631). She inquires about topics relating to their careers and seems mostly indifferent to their responses. Anna does well to integrate Outsiders and Insiders at her table, but her interest in the Outsiders seems superficial.

Though exiled from the upper class, Anna knows that she and the Outsiders belong to separate spheres. At times, professors are too absorbed in their own scholarship to mentor student writing. Mentorship requires Insiders to devote time that otherwise could be spent preparing an article for publication to further their career. Student essays are sometimes regarded as matters of the same “due courtesy” with which Anna treats her Outsider guests. The volume of assignments that professors must grade prevents them from being able to invest too much time into each assignment, but at the same time, I wish my essays received more engagement than a flattering “Nice!” scrawled in the margin of the page.

Unlike her social circle, Tolstoy treats Anna with marked compassion despite her moral and social transgressions. Though Anna's actions were considered radically wrong at the time, today our social conventions have changed, and we would treat Anna more clemently than her peers do. We need a comparable change in the conventions of scholarly discourse communities to make them more accepting. If professional conferences and journals took undergraduate writing more seriously, then professors would recognize a greater significance and potential in the works generated by undergraduates in their courses. This is not merely to say that professors should locate the already exceptional students in their classes and endorse their endeavors. Rather, students should be invited to cultivate their writing with the purpose of sharing their work in a professional venue.

From the outside Looking in (and Forward)

As an undergraduate, I am unmistakably an Outsider. The absence of both a graduate degree and a prestigious university to validate me largely dismisses my voice from the discourse community. Few reputable journals accept undergraduate submissions or offer mentors that reach beyond the classroom to introduce students to the academic conversation. Coursework and textbooks, like the one that Blumner reviews, may teach academic convention, but convention is useless when one is silenced in the parlor. Composition courses often teach students to write by creating their own parlors filled with an imagined audience to practice the conventions of the discourse. But—as Anna's dinner guests demonstrate—a discourse community is rarely idle, and the experience

gained from such an exercise is limited. Although I understand that I, like many undergraduates, am considered unprepared to enter a professional academic conversation—or perhaps simply incapable of it—I contend that the Outsider voice has both potential and value. This leads me, like Anna, to rally for a change in convention and to suggest a more open invitation to the parlor.

Although venues that allow undergraduates to publish and present their works to an academic audience already exist, I want to interrogate who comprises this so-called academic audience. Having contributed to such publications, I know better than to expect to see my name cited in an Insider's essay any time soon. Without any critical attention given to undergraduate voices, the worth of such publications is merely self-satisfaction for the students. Peers—that is, fellow undergraduates—may be the only people who read my work. They certainly will not integrate it into their own scholarship, because it does not possess the ethos of an Insider essay. Before the publication of this essay in *Young Scholars in Writing*, I lacked the ethos required to be considered seriously by an academic audience, not because my ideas do not deserve it, but because of a general lack of publications that would entertain a writer like me.

During my undergraduate years, I have been a member of a reading committee for the school's creative arts publication, and we, like most journals that accept undergraduate writing, operate using an acceptance/rejection binary when we evaluate submissions. We do not offer guided revisions or mentorships whereby students would have an opportunity to polish their work before presenting it to an audience. When needed, we proofread the submissions with the author's approval, but otherwise, the binary informs our selection process. It is doubtful that anyone outside the student body reads our publication, and our binary does not prepare students to present to a broader audience. We only recognize students' preexisting skills without trying to develop them. If we knew that a larger community would peruse and critically engage with our publication, we would alter our process to meet the expectations of our readers by helping writers revise their submissions. But seeing that the journal primarily exists to gratify and celebrate the writers, to give them another résumé entry, we reward only the best work and reject the rest, even if the rejections have the potential to be developed into viable pieces.

Even within Anna's dinner party, this problem exists. Anna invites Outsiders to the table, and though she offers them "due courtesy," she refuses to nurture her guests. Students need mentors. Mentors can gently guide the architect, encourage the doctor to speak up, and discreetly restrain and redirect the steward on an individual basis. A term paper may lack the academic legitimacy required in a professional academic discourse community, but unless an Insider instructs and leads an Outsider into the conversation, Insiders will continue to inadvertently or intentionally ostracize those of us who long to participate in the academic conversation. I have heard that this boundary even extends beyond undergraduate students and encompasses other Outsiders: graduate students, dissertators, and adjunct faculty. Without admittance to the parlor, Outsiders sit at the children's table in the adjoining room, supposedly parroting the grown-ups around the main table.

As a prospective graduate student, I have invested a great deal of time scouring university websites for master's programs only to find that many Master of Arts (MA) programs have been either cut or unfunded. The practical action for a prospective student is to risk the low-acceptance rates of doctoral programs (or transitional MA/PhD programs) and apply for them anyway, bypassing the master's degree. Yet, to be a competitive undergraduate candidate for post-graduate work, one must already have publication and conference presentation experience. This puts pressure on young scholars to develop professional skills while still learning the basics of critical theory and the conventions of academic discourse. Even with generous and nurturing mentors, students have only a few places to publish their work and even fewer reputable ones. It is true that undergraduates have much to learn—critical thinking skills, rhetorical moves, and theoretical frameworks—before they can contribute much that is meaningful to the academic conversation, but by continu-

ing to exclude them, the historical trend of “exclud[ing] because we have been excluded” endures (Ballif, Davis, and Mountford 591).

Anna provides a solution: Invite the Outsiders to the table. Anna knows of her guests’ imperfections and knows that they still have much to learn before they can avoid embarrassing themselves among the Insiders. Nevertheless, she asks them to dine with her at the same table. She does not excel at mentorship and her guests would have benefited if she had nurtured them more generously, but she makes an important move toward integrating two groups of people who convention otherwise would have kept separate. This breach in convention is what is needed in our academic parlor too. Convention has its utility. It provides structure to chaos and thus facilitates the conversation by creating a normalized mode of discourse. Young scholars can even benefit from convention. As Blumner contends, convention works as a teacher as well as a guide to familiarize students with the nature of academic writing (71). In the classroom, adherence to convention often marks the success of one’s discourse on the undergraduate level.

However, knowledge of conventions that may allow one to navigate *through* academic discourse does not necessarily enable one to enter *into* the conversation. Convention determines not only *how* one speaks but *who* can speak as well. I do not mean to suggest that the academic conversation must lower its standards to accept incompetent voices; rather, what I propose is that academics work one-on-one with undergraduates to enable their voices to speak up in a way that will be heard and considered by academic Insiders. This will require learning to value young writers not only for their perspectives as students but for their scholarly contributions as well. We need more journals to accept Outsider writings and more journals like *Young Scholars in Writing* that partner undergraduates with mentors, helping Outsiders gain both practice and credibility within the discourse community. An additional solution is to create exclusive sections in scholarly journals that highlight a few undergraduate voices in each issue, voices that have shown promise and insight. Works published in these sections would not be included to “reward” good undergraduate essays but to help experienced academics consider the ideas of those who are new to the conversation.

Professional conferences, too, should open sections to undergraduates, where they can receive one-on-one mentoring and advice from more experienced scholars, as well as crucial experience in a real Burkean parlor situation. The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), for example, has championed the integration of undergraduates into the academic community. The Committee on Undergraduate Research does well to recognize the potential of undergraduate contributions to the field of composition studies. In particular, the decision to allow undergraduates to submit poster presentations at CCCC was an important move toward integrating the parlor. More conferences should follow this example to create a space in the parlor for undergraduates to both learn about their field and share their own work. Undergraduates may fumble or be “cut to the quick,” but ultimately, all participants will leave the conference with more knowledge than when they entered.

As it stands, there are two options for the future of Burke’s parlor metaphor. The first is to revise the metaphor to acknowledge that constraints are present for newcomers in the parlor. This amendment would acknowledge the power structure that prevents Outsiders from entering the conversation. The second is to change the conventions that govern who can contribute to the conversation in the parlor. While things ended badly for Anna after she challenged the social conventions of nineteenth-century Russia, they may work differently for us. After all, Kenneth Burke, though considered one of the most influential theorists of all time, did not even have a college diploma to grant him Insider status. His metaphor can be read as an autobiographical account of his entrance into the discourse community, but he might not have had such success if he contended with academic conventions today. Unconventional thoughts inspire change in any discipline, and they keep

the conversation lively within the parlor. I envision a change in academic convention so that Burke's parlor more closely resembles a scholarly dinner party. Outsiders are paired with Insiders as dining partners, and they are seated alongside everyone else at the same table. After all, gathered together around a table, we can learn from each other.

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